

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: FEDERICO DETOMAL, retired plantation worker

Federico Detomal, Visayan, one of three children, was born July 15, 1886 in Bareli, Cebu. He worked on Negros sugar plantations in the Philippines for seven years before coming to Hawaii in 1914.

An adventuresome sort, he worked on Kauai, Oahu, and Maui plantations before settling at Kilauea, on Kauai in 1936. During the 1924 strike, he was in Waipahu, Oahu. Although he was not a striker, he visited with companions in a Honolulu strike camp and donated to support the strike.

He has remained a single man and currently resides in Kapaa.

Tape No. 5-41-1-78 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Federico Detomal (FD)

December 7, 1978

Kapaa, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG)

[Interview conducted at Senior Citizens' lunch program in Kapaa, Kauai.]

EG: When you arrived here, where were you assigned?

FD: In Kilauea. After that, I was in Waipahu, on Oahu. After I was in Waipahu, then I was in Maui.

EG: Were you working before, in the Philippines, before you came here?

FD: Yes, I was.

EG: And what kind of work were you doing?

FD: I was working in the sugar plantations in Negros. I worked on the sugar plantations for seven years before I came to Hawaii.

EG: During the time of the strike, in 1924...

FD: Yeah, I was in Waipahu.

EG: Did you know, at that time, that there was a strike?

FD: Of course, I did. I myself, I was not included in the strike. The plantation that I was on did not go out on strike. We were in charge of sustaining the strikers from the other plantations, because almost all the other plantations on Oahu went out.

EG: Did you yourself give help for the strikers?

FD: Yes, I did. I was giving rice.

EG: Do you know any of the strike leaders?

FD: Yeah, Manlapit. He was the leader.

EG: Did you ever hear him speak?

FD: Oh yes, many times.

EG: Where did you hear him speak?

FD: In Waipahu. Somebody was asking him--Mr. Green--after a talk, "Pablo Manlapit, why are you causing the Filipinos to go out on strike?"

And Manlapit answered him, "I'm not the one who's causing the workers to go out on strike. You are. You, the owners of the plantation. Because you're not giving them what they're asking for. You're the ones who are causing them, the workers, to go out on strike."

It was really very beautiful to listen to him talk.

EG: What language did he use?

FD: Tagalog, Filipino and English.

EG: Did you understand what he said?

FD: Well, I understood the Filipino part.

EG: Why is it that you didn't go out on strike?

FD: Because there were some plantations that were in charge of sustaining people who were out on strike. Maybe each worker, every month, gave one sack of rice for the strikers.

EG: How long was the strike?

FD: I can't think how long it was, but it's quite a long time.

EG: How do you look at the strike now, as you look back on it after all these years?

FD: I can't say that it was good, and I can't say that it was bad. We were only asking for \$2 a day. And if that had been given I could say it was really good. Maybe it was useless because we never did get what we were asking for. When we first arrived it was only 75 cents that they were paying on the plantations, per day, for work. From 6:00 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon.

EG: How come you moved from so many islands? You started out in Kauai, then went to Oahu, and then went to Maui, and then went back to Kauai.

FD: I just wanted to see what it was like on the different islands. If you go back to the Philippines, you can't tell people that you had seen all the islands in Hawaii.

EG: Where was the strike camp on Oahu, when you were there in 1924, working at Aiea?

FD: It wasn't in Waipahu. It was right there in Honolulu. It was right near the CPC [California Packing Corporation].

EG: Did you ever visit the strikers yourself?

FD: Yes, we did. When we went to visit, we would take along the food that are donations. And of course, we'd visit them there. And others who were fishermen would bring along fish for them.

EG: Were there many strikers there at the camp?

FD: Yes, there were. There were very many. They were mixed up; men, women, and children. They weren't too bad off because the donations were quite good.

EG: Where were they living?

FD: They made tents for themselves. They had toilets and water, and everything that they needed.

EG: In your estimation, how many people were there inside of the strike camp?

FD: More or less, 500.

EG: Did you hear what happened in Hanapepe, at that time, even though you were there in Oahu?

FD: Yes, I did. I heard that there were a lot who died at Hanapepe. I just heard it from others.

EG: What did you think when you heard that there were Filipinos who were killed?

FD: What can you do? There's nothing you can do about it.

EG: Just heard it from other people. Did you ever hear the name of Ligot?

FD: Oh yeah. I heard his name. He's the one who betrayed the Filipinos. We would have won the strike if it hadn't been for Ligot. Ligot gave a speech there in Aala Park, in Honolulu. Way back, the Filipinos used to go fishing, and they didn't need any kind of a license or anything. After he spoke, it seemed like Filipinos then had to get some kind of a license in order to be able to go out and fish. So he made life very difficult for even the fishermen who were Filipino.

EG: Why do you think he has that kind of a character?

FD: Well, what I heard is that he was given money by the big powers. The owners of the plantation gave 'em money. That's what I heard.

EG: Did you ever see him yourself?

FD: Oh yeah, I saw him. He's a little guy. Ligot told lies to the Ilocanos back in the Philippines, about conditions here. And so they sold everything. They sold their caribous and their lands and everything else, and they came over here expecting it to be really something fantastic. And what happened is the strike was still going on when the Ilocanos began to arrive. Actually, that was Ligot's intention; to replace the Visayans with Ilocanos. But when they came here, they were really very angry at him because it wasn't the picture that he had painted when he invited them to come. The complaints of the Ilocanos is what finally got Ligot removed from the position.

[He is under the impression that all Filipinos united, including the Ilocanos.]

Everybody, all the Filipinos united together in this strike. Kahuku, Waialua, Ewa, Waipahu, Aiea. Aiea is the only place that didn't go out on strike because they were supposed to be the ones helping the strikers, to sustain the strikers.

EG: How did you decide that you wouldn't go out on strike? Did you take a vote, something like that?

FD: No. We had a common understanding among ourselves. We talked it over and just decided it that way. It would have been okay if we had had a lot of money or had been here in Hawaii for quite a while. But we were fairly new sugar workers at that time. We could make a bigger contribution by supporting the strike in case it failed.

EG: Did the bosses in the plantation in some way try to prevent you from going out on strike?

FD: Yes, they did. They were trying to make everybody afraid. They were warning them. But because we were only receiving 75 cents a day, people were really determined to go out on strike, hoping to get the salary up a little bit. We were only getting 75 cents in 1924, when we went into the strike.

EG: What was your job there in Waipahu?

FD: I was painting houses.

EG: Could you make some kind of a comparison from maybe your life there in the Philippines and here in Hawaii?

FD: Well, if I compared the two it's probably better here than it was there. The life was very difficult when I was there. I don't know what it's like now. I haven't been back, but it was better here. And besides that, I've been here a longer time than I was in the Philippines. Even the work, as difficult as it was here in Hawaii

when we first arrived, it was easier than what we had in the Philippines, on the sugar plantations.

EG: Did you ever see any guns or anything like that in the strike camp on Oahu?

FD: Personally, I never did. The only place I ever heard about anything like that was here in Kauai, in Hanapepe, when the strikers were killed.

EG: Do you know anything of what happened to Manlapit?

FD: Well, when he was still here, right after the strike he was sent back to the Philippines. He was deported, because he was the one who was in charge of the strike. Later, he came back here again. I don't know where he died; whether it was in the Philippines or here in the United States.

END OF INTERVIEW

The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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